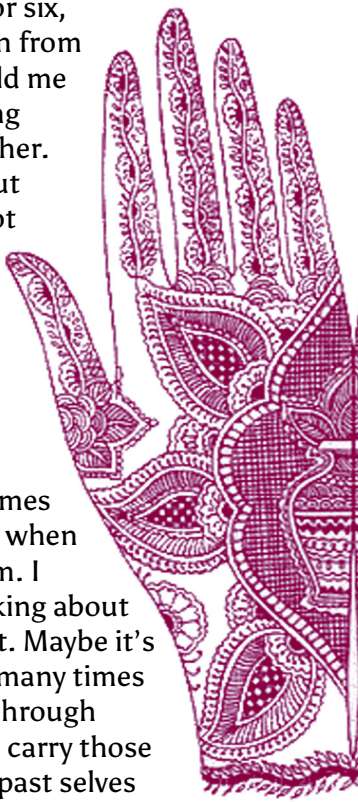
Spectral Gestures

human stories for ghosts

In the two-bedroom duplex I grew up in the God lamp was in my room and my ma thought the spiritual energies were rubbing off on me. For a few months, when I was five or six, I saw brown eyes staring down from the ceiling every night. She told me the eyes were angels protecting me as I slept. I never believed her. I had visceral nightmares about those eyes scrutinising me, not knowing if I was asleep or awake. As a child, those eyes never protected me in ways that mattered.



Afterlives dictate life, and I guess my fascination with spectres and the unknown comes from wondering how they felt when they were tangible in our realm. I feel kinda weird and raw thinking about ghosts and hauntings and shit. Maybe it's because I feel like I have died many times in my life...a self fragmented through trauma. I dunno, in that way I carry those ghosts in me. The spectres of past selves and small selves and scared selves – little Lens who would not cry, but bite their hand very hard instead.

Through writing and thinking about indenture, I also make space in my body for other people's death; for communities connected through an unspoken, unending grief. These are ghosts we share communally, that transfer through our bodies each time we smell a cane fire and see the black ash float in the air, or taste the salt on our lips as we gaze into the kala pani and wonder which family member jumped off the ship and which ones made it to shore?

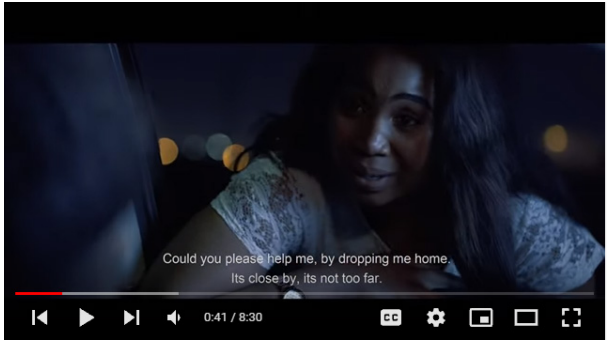
I guess, as humans in these fleshy forms, we are vessels for those ghosts. We are ourselves, yet carry the imprint of those who have died. In my face I carry Lutchmee's nose and in my taste, Arnachellum's penchant for grape Chappies...and sometimes we do or say things that we can't place. Those are ancestral gestures, things given to us from those who came before, who exist alongside and inside us.

What if we thought of ourselves as the ghosts and our ancestors as the living?

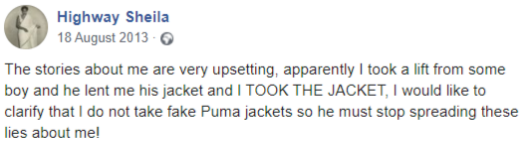
ghost haunting highways

WHO IS HIGHWAY SHIELA?

Well, depends on who's asking and who's telling – there's a charou version and a Zulu version. The story I was told goes as follows: Shiela is an Indian woman of preternatural beauty who wears a white sari and walks alongside Higginson Highway in the late hours of the evening, or the early hours of the morning. She'll ask for help – a lift maybe. It is said by some that she has just been raped. Others say she's a sex worker. In all versions, she is a distressed woman, her long hair wild. She screams for help.



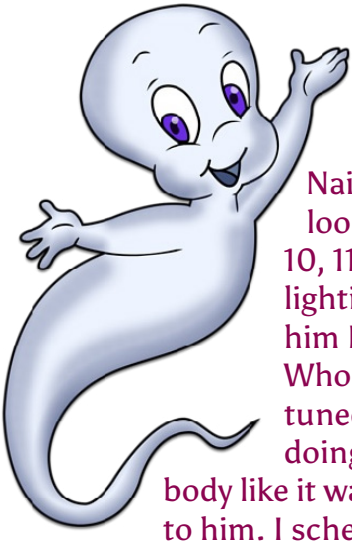
And a Kindly Male Driver stops for her, seduced by the beautiful woman in distress. When she's been offered a lift to drop her off at home she climbs into the car and a cold chill overcomes the driver. The driver offers her his jacket because of the ghostly chill. She takes the jacket and he drops her off at home. The next


Highway Sheila
18 August 2013 ·
The stories about me are very upsetting, apparently I took a lift from some boy and he lent me his jacket and I TOOK THE JACKET, I would like to clarify that I do not take fake Puma jackets so he must stop spreading these lies about me!

day he comes to fetch his jacket. The aunty living at the house tells the Kindly Male Driver that Shiela died many years ago. That her tombstone is in the cemetery if he doesn't believe her. When he visits Shiela's tombstone he finds his jacket. Highway Shiela's legacy endures as a punishing force; a vengeful spirit intent on causing death on Higginson – ***the highway's siren.***

Stories of women's rage capture our imagination like few others do. She's the reason why, if ever you find yourself on Higginson Highway in the early hours of the morning, you must never ever stop to offer a woman a lift.

- film stills from Mel Mthembu's *Aba'lele* and Kumaran Naidu's *Highway Shiela*. Both are available on YouTube



"Can you describe what you saw?

Naidoo: It was a boy. He looked like he was about 10, 11 years old. Char lightie. As soon as I saw him I tuned: "Who you? Who you?" but he never tuned nothing. All he was doing was scratching his body like it was itching. I walked to him. I schemed maybe he was one of the lighties from the distict, trying to steal something. But when I got close I know this wasn't some normal lightie.

What do you mean?

Naidoo: He was slaaning an old-fashioned dhoti, you know how Gandhi should slaan? Like that. Plus the lightie's skin was green-green. It looked like his painted himself but not paint that was. I could see and smell that his skin was covered with

crushed leaves from a syringa berry tree. I knew the smell from when I was a lightie. My ma put it over my skin when I had measles.

Were you scared?
Naidoo: I was skrik I won't lie. You won't be skrik?

I next heard from Naidoo two weeks after our telephone conversations. I had abandoned the green ghost story in the interim and had quickly written up a post on a mythical giant cane rat that I had read about on the KwaZulu-Natal South Coast.[1]

Unholy Indenture
Enchantment — Aura
M20
Enchant creature
When enchanted creature dies, return that card to the battlefield under your control with a +1/+1 counter on it.
"Don't think of it as selling your soul. It's more like you're bequeathing it to me."
—Vilis, Broker of Blood
119/280 C
M20 • EN
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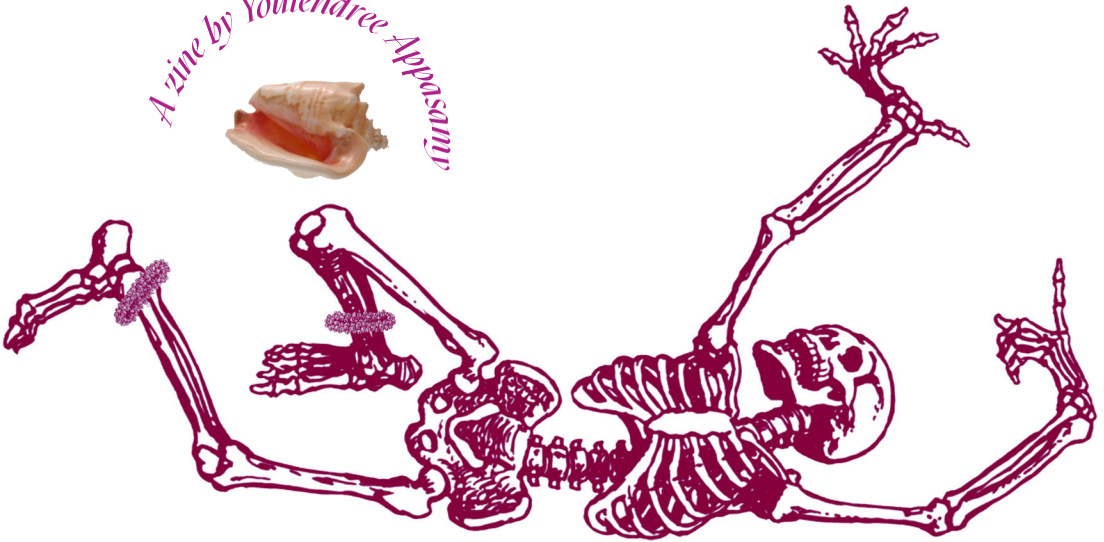
1. According to South Coast folklore, the rat was a reincarnation of a notoriously malicious sugarcane plantation overseer."

- excerpt from Pravasan Pillay's short story 'Green Ghost' in *Chatsworth*

A zine by Youlendree Appasamy